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SUBJECT: BANGLADESH MISSION FOOD SECURITY DIPLOMACY AND DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY

REF: STATE 124059

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Bangladesh and the U.S. diplomatic-development team at Embassy Dhaka (Mission Dhaka) are well-positioned to maximize the opportunities presented by the USG's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative. Mission Dhaka will capitalize on the political will of Bangladesh's leaders and our whole-of-government operating platform to address the underlying causes of hunger, poverty and food insecurity in Bangladesh. Almost nowhere else on the planet is food security more urgently needed. Bangladesh's population is half the size of the United States, yet squeezed into a landmass the size of Iowa, and faces natural and man-made threats, from rising sea levels and melting glaciers upstream to violent extremism. Tackling food security in Bangladesh will not only contribute to economic growth, but can help the nation adapt to climate change and maintain its tradition of moderate, tolerant Islam. Mission Dhaka's diplomacy and development strategy is keyed to the five principles of the food security initiative. (reftel)

1I. Comprehensive Approach

12. (SBU) A comprehensive approach to food security advances agriculture-led growth, reduces under-nutrition, and increases the impact of humanitarian food assistance. The Government of Bangladesh's (GOB's) National Food Policy Plan of Action has three thematic areas: food availability, economic access to food, and nutrition/utilization of food. Guided by both the GOB's plans and the USG's food security principles, U.S. Mission Dhaka's food security task force has identified four broad areas for potential USG action:

--Family planning and maternal and infant nutrition;
--Sustainable agriculture (includes climate change and adaptation) and agriculture-based economic growth;
--Safety net programs and non-emergency food aid programming; and,
--Governance and capacity building as a cross-cutting issue to support i) GOB policy formation at the national level and ii) policy implementation and management/delivery of services in food security related sectors at the local level.

13. (SBU) Each of these four areas will require efforts involving diplomacy, development and policy reform. Mission Dhaka enjoys unparalleled access to key decision-makers in Bangladesh, and we already are engaging on food security at all levels, from the Prime Minister on down. As we engage with the GOB, donors and other partners, we also will implement a public outreach strategy to

ensure public support and highlight U.S. assistance to Bangladesh.

¶4. (U) An upcoming target of opportunity to engage with the GOB, civil society, and donors on food security will be the Bangladesh Development Forum scheduled for the end of February. This will be the largest gathering of Bangladesh development actors in several years. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will chair the Forum, and food security will be one of the top items on the agenda.

Family Planning and Nutrition

¶5. (SBU) In the area of family planning and nutrition, unsustainable population growth threatens to overtake growth in food production. Severe under-nutrition fosters a recurring cycle of poverty. While Bangladesh has significantly reduced its population growth rate, population growth continues to threaten development progress. Bangladesh needs to revitalize its family planning program and better integrate it into development programs more broadly. Child nutrition and maternal health practices are especially weak in Bangladesh, in part because of cultural beliefs that harm, rather than help, women and children. Changing these beliefs and behaviors will require active engagement at a variety of levels, through development programs, outreach to government and community leaders, and public diplomacy.

Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Growth

¶6. (SBU) In the area of sustainable agriculture and agriculture-based economic growth, the challenges we will address include:

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--low agricultural productivity;
--underdeveloped internal markets for agricultural products;
--a constrained business environment that hinders private sector investment;
--environmental degradation and climate change that puts additional pressure on agricultural productivity and land; and,
--a failure by successive governments to mobilize and target agricultural resources to achieve broad-based economic growth.

The GOB's current focus on agricultural productivity centers on rice production and managing disasters. The USG will work with the GOB to broaden this emphasis and expand the environment for diversified agricultural production and integration into regional markets.

¶7. (SBU) In addition to development programs, diplomatic and policy efforts in this area will focus on improving Bangladesh's business and investment climate; identifying policies and mechanisms to ensure better inclusion of women and the ultra-poor in agriculture and economic growth activities; promoting technologies, including biotechnology, that support agriculture productivity and sustainability; and supporting efforts to connect agriculture and food security with conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

¶8. (SBU) Mission Dhaka will also continue its efforts to encourage market-based solutions. Many in Bangladesh, including some of its top leaders, identify philosophically with public sector solutions despite widespread evidence that the private sector is the best driver for growth. Similarly, Mission Dhaka will continue to promote expansion and diversification in a range of areas, from agricultural production to trade to financing mechanisms.

Safety net programs and non-emergency food aid

¶9. (SBU) In the area of safety net programs and non-emergency food aid programming, Mission Dhaka will seek to support efforts to make social safety net programs more efficient, better targeted and transparent. Bangladesh's leaders use social safety net programs as a political as well as an economic and social tool. It will require efforts at all levels of the USG to ensure the GOB focuses on

economic and social, rather than political, outcomes of social safety net programs.

Governance and capacity building

¶10. (SBU) The politicization of issues of national interest, over-centralization of government, and weak capacity and polarization within the bureaucracy are major challenges to the success of the food security initiative. Mission Dhaka will work at all levels, including through public outreach, to ensure these challenges do not become barriers to success. Mission Dhaka will also need to serve as an "institutional memory" on food security for succeeding governments and will need to ensure that successive GOB leaders do not throw the baby out with the bath water in their efforts to distinguish themselves from their predecessors.

II. Country-led Plan

¶11. (SBU) Bangladesh's Awami League government has proclaimed food security its top priority. "Controlling food prices" was the Awami League's main slogan during the December 2008 campaign that led to the party's landslide victory in national elections. When the GOB says it wants to "control food prices," it means it wants to ensure food security.

¶12. (SBU) A number of national plans already exist that focus on food security in Bangladesh. They include:

- the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II;
- the National Food Policy Plan of Action;
- the National Plan of Action for Nutrition; and,
- the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

While these plans are comprehensive inventories of problems and potential solutions, they fail to target resources, specify achievable priorities, identify resources or spell out implementation mechanisms. Mission Dhaka, especially USAID, has already worked with the GOB to develop these plans, in particular the National Food Policy Plan of Action, and has begun the process

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of helping the GOB to refine priorities and link priority actions to the national budget. Mission Dhaka's diplomacy and development strategy has identified aspects of these plans the USG is best-positioned to support. At the same time we will encourage the GOB and other partners to fill gaps and pursue a comprehensive approach to poverty and food insecurity.

¶13. (SBU) One of the many challenges to tackling food security in Bangladesh is the plethora of GOB agencies involved in various aspects of food security. Some ten ministries, including Finance, Agriculture, Food and Disaster Management, Health and Family Welfare, Women and Children Affairs, Fisheries and Livestock, and Environment and Forest, plus the Parliament, play a role in food security. GOB agencies operate like stove pipes and do not adequately communicate with each other, except at the level of Minister. In addition, there are differing views on food security among the ministries and officials, delineation of responsibility is often vague or overlapping, and in some cases there is little or no accountability for results.

¶14. (SBU) Mission Dhaka, which actively engages with most of Bangladesh's 30-plus ministries, already works to promote inter-ministerial communication. As the food security initiative moves forward, Mission Dhaka will pay special attention to involving all appropriate ministries at various levels. Through diplomacy, development and public outreach, Mission Dhaka will encourage consensus within government and among other partners on Bangladesh's food security activities. Given the challenges inherent in developing a consensus among many actors, the timeline for achieving consensus will evolve as USG interventions take place. At a minimum, we will implement identified priorities as we work toward consensus.

¶15. (SBU) Since August 2009, Mission Dhaka has engaged at all levels with government, civil society and the private sector to highlight President Obama's commitment to global food security. We ensured that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina represented Bangladesh at the roundtable on food security hosted in September by the Secretary and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the margins of the UN General Assembly. As the USG's plans on food security became more focused, in October and November the Ambassador and others engaged in discussions with a range of Ministers and other high-level officials regarding Bangladesh's designation as a food security focus country. We leveraged VIP visits such as that of Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Vermeer to highlight USG food security priorities. Mission Dhaka will continue to seek such opportunities to shape Bangladesh food security policy, in addition to regular engagement. Potential occasions for significant dialogue with the GOB in the near term include the Bangladesh Development Forum in late February 2010, the annual U.S. trade show sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh and upcoming high-level visits by Washington officials.

III. Global, Regional, Local Coordination

¶16. (SBU) Mission Dhaka's integrated working environment makes it ideally suited to the food security initiative's whole-of-government approach. Our food security task force includes representatives from USAID, State and USDA, and coordinates with the Mission's Economic Working Group, which also includes representatives from Public Affairs, DOJ and DOD. Food security and broad-based economic growth are core objectives of Mission Dhaka's strategic plan, which the Mission reviews on a quarterly basis, usually in conjunction with the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. This in turn feeds into the annual Mission Strategic Plan (MSP) process and will inform our contributions to the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR). Mission Dhaka's MSP was named best MSP of the year in 2009.

¶17. (SBU) Mission Dhaka's working group mechanism ensures a high degree of coordination and minimizes gaps. Our working groups, including the food security task force, regularly meet with counterparts outside the USG. For example, as we prepared our Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative (GHFSI) implementation plan, we enlisted officials from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) to brief us on Bangladesh's food, particularly rice, situation. Mission Dhaka also incorporates public diplomacy into all objectives and will seek opportunities to showcase the food security initiative for the Bangladesh public.

¶18. (SBU) As part of our GHFSI implementation plan, USAID

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Bangladesh intends to create a new, full-time position to serve as country coordinator for all GHFSI activities. Guided by the inter-agency food security task force, the country coordinator will serve as the focal point for food security activities, from programs to policy guidance to public outreach.

IV. Leveraging Multilateral Institutions

¶19. (SBU) Bangladesh has a large and active donor community of which Mission Dhaka is a leading member. Donors, including the main multilateral institutions, interact regularly with the GOB and each other through a Local Consultative Group (LCG) structure that includes topic-focused sub-groups. The LCG sub-group most relevant to the GHFS Initiative is the Agriculture and Food Security sub-group. USAID has already presented the broad outlines of the GHFS Initiative objectives and will continue to use this sub-group as a platform for communication with the donor partners. Key members of the sub-group include the U.K. Department for International Development (DfID), the European Union, Denmark, the Netherlands, FAO, the World Food Program (WFP), World Bank, and the

Asian Development Bank (ADB).

¶20. (SBU) Mission Dhaka's food security task force also has identified a number of bilateral and multi-lateral institutions that will be key partners in the four priority areas identified for USG investment: family planning and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, safety net and non-emergency food aid programs, and governance and capacity-building. Existing and planned programs by donors and institutions like WFP, the World Bank, FAO, the UN Development Program (UNDP), DfID, the European Union, UNICEF, Germany's Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Embassy of Denmark, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) in particular will complement USG efforts on food security.

¶21. (SBU) In addition to working through the LCG structure, Mission Dhaka will continue to interact with bilateral and multilateral counterparts both at the working level and at the level of Ambassador, USAID Mission Director and Agricultural Attache. The food security task force solicited input from donors for our implementation plan. The food security initiative is now a regular component of our discussions with donors and other partners.

¶V. Sustained and Accountable Commitment

¶22. (SBU) U.S. support for Bangladesh and its development, including food security, dates to Bangladesh's independence. Since 1971, the United States has provided Bangladesh with more than \$5 billion in assistance, more than half of that food aid. GOB leaders and Bangladeshis more broadly recognize the vital role we have played in its development, and they welcome further engagement, particularly on food security. The Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, then, represents a continuation and expansion of an already-close partnership. Though Bangladesh's food security situation remains dire, it has improved greatly in the nation's 37-year history, in part due to U.S. support.

¶23. (SBU) The strong U.S.-Bangladesh relationship will aid efforts to encourage and shape Bangladesh's response to food insecurity. Raising incomes, increasing agricultural productivity, mitigating the effects of climate change on agricultural productivity, diversifying the food basket, establishing market-based systems, changing infant and young child feeding practices, and more transparent and reliable safety net programs are all elements of a successful, long-term food security program. This will require sustained political will, both in Bangladesh and in donor countries, to keep hunger and poverty at the top of the world development agenda. The additional resources committed under the GHFS Initiative will, for the first time in over a decade, allow the USG to make a credible, long-term commitment to addressing poverty and food security through broad-based economic growth driven by increased agricultural productivity and diversification.

¶24. (SBU) Building Bangladesh's internal capacity to meet these goals and be accountable for results will also require substantial reform and intelligent allocation of public resources. Lasting change can only come if there is strong political will and long term commitment to focus public resources more efficiently and effectively on reform and capacity improvement.

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¶25. (SBU) The magnitude of the potential funding for Bangladesh on food security and other development initiatives will allow the USG to play an even stronger leadership role in engaging other donors and the GOB to shape national policies that can significantly impact the long term food security situation in Bangladesh. Mission Dhaka will leverage the strong U.S.-Bangladesh relationship to maintain momentum on food security. The convergence of U.S. commitment, the will of Bangladesh's top leaders and the public recognition of the extent of food insecurity here should help propel Bangladesh to new levels of development and break its cycle of hunger and poverty.

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